

The WhiteCane

The magazine of the Iowa Department for the Blind

Taking the Next Step, New Beginnings



INSIDE:

Physical fitness, mentoring, and beep baseball

Journey out of fear to growth and progress

“You can’t live with your parents forever”

Library auxiliary groups provide support

Mixin’ it up at the Hoover Building

The new Victor Reader Stream

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|from the editor

Spring is finally here. Hopefully, by the time you read this, temperatures will match expectations and the robins I saw struggling in the snow toward the end of winter will be singing a happier song. Another sign of unusual times? It certainly seems that way!

All that can be said for sure is that the cycles of life continue to end and begin anew, and we must work hard to adapt to the shifting circumstances and challenges of today's complex social and economic scene.

This issue of the White Cane looks at different ways our clients, staff, and supporters face new challenges, encounter decisive moments, and take meaningful steps to create new circumstances in which to find their own paths towards greater independence and living happy, fulfilling lives.

— Rick Dressler

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Printed with soy ink.



The White Cane is published quarterly. Address or subscription changes can be sent to information@blind.state.ia.us

The Iowa Department for the Blind has been facing significant challenges with this year's budget. Because we've not received an increase in state appropriations since 2008 and our expenses are greater than available funds, it was necessary to release four full time employees. The reductions resulted in a savings of \$426,000 annually, and the money that has been saved will be used to continue to provide quality services to clients of the agency. The employees who were released will be missed by staff and clients, but their work has been reassigned to other IDB staff members. We will have to continue to press ahead to provide blind Iowans with the services that they need and expect.

IDB continues to face uncertainty as we await the legislature's final decision concerning our request for a budget increase. Nevertheless, we must take new steps to enhance programs for blind Iowans. We are expanding training opportunities for our clients by creating programs that are shorter in duration. Students now have the option of attending the Orientation Center to participate in training that focuses primarily on the development of computer and technology skills. Students receiving this training will receive instruction in other areas as well, and the hope is that they will decide to

participate in a comprehensive center program. If they do not, they will still have developed some of the necessary skills to participate in vocational training and employment. We're also identifying VR and IL consumers that want to receive computer instruction in their home communities.

As many of you know, our current chair of the Iowa Commission for the Blind board, Mike Hoenig, was not reappointed to serve a third term. I want to take this opportunity to thank Commissioner Hoenig for six years of outstanding service to the blind community in Iowa. We wish him the very best as he continues to promote quality services for blind Iowans in other capacities. Joseph Van Lent was appointed to fill the position that Mike held. Sandi Ryan was also recently appointed to fill the vacancy that was created when Jim Omvig resigned for health reasons. Our newly appointed commissioners have spent many years working to enhance the quality of life for blind Iowans, and we look forward to partnering with them as IDB advances toward its goals.



Sincerely,
Richard Sorey

Fitness class gets students moving



Class instructor Randy Landgrebe gives Orientation Center student Santo Gonzalez some weight training pointers.

The fitness class for Orientation Center students began in November 2012 to complement the existing, and often more mentally-based, training that IDB offers. Based on the premise of constantly varied, functional movements, the fitness class is teaching students to move more confidently through their world. The class regularly challenges both physical and mental comfort zones with the intention of creating mental toughness and greater physical strength and agility.

IDB Library Administrator Randy Landgrebe, a CrossFit enthusiast and wilderness trekker, leads the twice weekly session. Field Operations Secretary Bettina Dolinsek also helps teach the class in the fitness center in IDB's basement. A recent visit to one of the exercise sessions found students helping each other in a spirit of camaraderie, with those that had a better understanding of some of the moves helping those that were novices. It's great to see this tradition being carried on, another echo of the department's history and programming in the building. ♦



Bettina Dolinsek helps Dana Courter during a workout.



Center students exercise as a group twice weekly.

New mentoring program

IDB will connect newcomers with veterans of the blindness community

Have you ever thought you would be effective at mentoring or providing peer support to another lowan who is blind or visually impaired? This just might be your chance. The Iowa Department for the Blind is looking for upbeat and positive individuals who can share a skill or technique, information, advice, resources, or maybe just an encouraging word with another blind person. All you are investing is your time.

If you are interested, please fill out the form online at www.idbonline.org/idb-mentoring-program. This information will be used to build a mentoring and peer support database that staff will use to provide

even better services to blind and visually impaired individuals. In order to participate, you will need to agree to a background check. You will also need to attend a training workshop that will be held at the Department on September 7, 2013, from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Lunch will be provided.

Thank you for helping the Iowa Department for the Blind continue to provide top-notch services to lowans with vision loss.

Please contact us if you have any questions: Sandy Tigges, 515-281-1313, Sandy.Tigges@blind.state.ia.us or Rick Dressler, 515-281-1314, Rick.Dressler@blind.state.ia.us ♦



Mentoring may be short-term, it may be long-term. It might involve sharing thoughts and experiences on a walk.

Play ball!

The Iowa Reapers, a Des Moines-based beep baseball team formed by coach Frank Guerra in June 2011, is looking forward to another busy season as the weather warms up and it's time to get outside and play ball. Beep Baseball is an adapted variation of baseball for the visually impaired and blind population. The Reapers are sponsored by Adaptive Sports Iowa, part of the Iowa Sports Foundation. You can learn more about the game and the team's schedule for this year by visiting ASI's website at www.adaptivesportsiowa.org/Programs/BeepBaseball.aspx. You can also find the Iowa Reapers on Facebook and Twitter.

As they begin spring practices, the Reapers are reaching out to anyone who is interested in joining the team. You must be 14 years of age or older to play on the competitive team. Last summer several IDB

students and staff participated when the team competed at the 2012 NBBA Beep Baseball World Series in Ames, Iowa.

A goalball team has also formed and plays in the off-season. If you are interested in getting involved with either team, contact: Frank Guerra at 515-778-1293, or email iowareapers@gmail.com for beep baseball, iowagoalball@gmail.com for goalball. ♦



IDB's Transition Specialist Julie Aufdenkamp at bat.



The Iowa Reapers after their first game at the 2012 NBBA Beep Baseball World Series in Ames, Iowa.

Step by step to progress

By Barb Weigel
IL Project Specialist



Carol Flickinger

Carol Flickinger, 63, of Rockwell City, has had vision problems for the past 30 years due to Keratoconus and histoplasmosis. Both conditions cause significant visual changes and progress over time. The reality of her circumstances and a human catalyst were crucial factors for Carol finally to face her situation and make necessary positive steps to greater freedom.

Carol was first referred to the Iowa Department for the Blind (IDB) in the 1980s. At that time, she was working, managing her home, and planning to have a cornea transplant when needed. She wasn't yet ready to accept help.

When Carol developed a cataract in 2010 and lost a lot of usable vision, she was faced with a choice—either undergo cataract surgery or a cornea transplant. She opted for the cataract surgery because it required the least amount of recovery. But, after the

surgery, Carol learned she was no longer a candidate for a cornea transplant. Her belief that her vision loss could be fixed evaporated. She was going to lose her vision and there wasn't anything anyone could do about it.

When Carol was referred to IDB again in 2011, she was skeptical about the value of the department's services but agreed to meet with Liz Soenen, a Rehabilitation Teacher. Liz offered tips and techniques to make everyday tasks easier and encouraged Carol not to let her vision loss prevent her from doing what she wanted to do. Carol quickly realized she had "wasted a lot of years" and had been "doing things the hard way." She also realized she didn't have to deal with her vision loss on her own.

The list of tasks that Carol was having difficulty with was long. She was having trouble setting her appliances, plugging items into outlets, measuring ingredients, and reading and timing recipes. She no longer went out alone. She couldn't read price tags or public signs. She felt she had trouble keeping her home clean because she could not see the dirty places. She had problems using her computer. The 'hunt and peck' method of typing was no longer working for her, and she was making more mistakes. Dialing a phone and accessing phone numbers were also challenging. She was unable to read print efficiently, affecting her ability to read prescriptions, make and read a grocery list, and read her mail. She had been working on creating a scrapbook for each of her children, but with much regret, gave this project up as her vision decreased. She found herself relying heavily on her sister, which eroded her sense of independence.

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In October of that year, Carol participated in a Community-Based Training (CBT) led by IDB's field staff. After day one, she came home with a "newfound energy" to clean and take care of her home. Her courage was beginning to return. After day two, she decided to help with Food for the Heartland, a community project –again, inspired by the training. Flickinger began losing her fear of the future and embracing life again.

In November, Carol toured the IDB and saw for herself all of the things the students at the Orientation Center were doing without vision. "They were moving their fingers so fast and I wondered how. In shop, a lady was figuring out measurements with a rotomatic and I thought wow! I remember the guys with their finished projects from shop class. It was neat to see the finished projects and how happy they were." Carol's confidence and insight into her ability to do what she wanted grew even stronger.

In December, Carol began improving her keyboarding skills. She became more efficient and accurate with her computer. She started using a handheld magnifier for easier access to print. Although she had tried magnification before, she found those obtained through IDB's Aids and Devices store to be more effective. She began using writing guides for completing grocery lists, addressing envelopes, taking messages and more. Setting her oven and other appliances became possible through the use of tactile markings. Adapted measuring cups and spoons gave her more accuracy in the kitchen. Talking time pieces and kitchen timer were also helpful. She managed her medications with a weekly pill organizer in combination with alternative methods for identifying her medications. As these steps of learning new skills were taken, Carol experienced decreased daily frustrations and was motivated to learn even more.

In April, 2012, Carol took the opportunity to participate in Senior Orientation, a week-long training at IDB's Des Moines headquarters. Prior to going, she brazenly posted her intentions in a Facebook message, displaying her growing acceptance of her vision loss to her contacts, confident enough now to share it with the world and not hide it anymore. Her Facebook community has since become another source of support for Carol.

During Senior Orientation, Carol learned more non-visual methods for cooking, cleaning, and labeling household items. She began learning to use a white cane and Braille and how these tools could be helpful in her everyday life. She also participated in crafts and home ec class.

Everyone who has attended a transition session or attended the Orientation Center knows about Business Class, a group discussion about blindness. Sharing experiences and accomplishments with others who are blind was perhaps the most important part of Carol's week. Several times, she found herself in tears as she further accepted her blindness and faced feelings she had buried for so many years.

Afterwards, Carol wrote, "Just wanted to thank you again. I loved every minute of it. My emotions are all over the place since I've arrived home but I am thinking all the years of stuffed feelings have to come out and heal before I can move on. I would say the most important thing [I learned] is no fear of the future. I can do it and I have a wonderful support team to help me! I feel so blessed by all of you. Thanks for investing so much time and effort in me!"

Today, Carol feels life is much easier. "My mindset's different. Instead of avoiding a task, I now think, how else can I do this? My first instinct is figuring it out on my

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“You Can’t Live with Your Parents Forever”

By Betty Hansen
Deaf-Blind Specialist

When Marisa Beekman graduated from Pocahontas Area Community High School in 2007, she knew she wanted to go to college and eventually work. Getting to where she is today involved a multi-step journey. Her desire, intellect, social skills, and assistance from the Iowa Department for the Blind contributed to her success in her current job as a Human Resources Facilitator.

Marisa was first introduced to IDB at age 18 by her high school AEA counselor. With the department’s help, Marisa attended Drake University to study Business Administration before switching to Central College in Pella, and ultimately to Buena Vista in Storm Lake to study Political Science and Public Administration.



However, it wasn’t just her valuable college experience that helped Marisa land her first job. It was her personality and attitude. Significantly, Marisa wasn’t fully aware of her own potential until attending

the IDB’s Job Readiness Training conducted by Brenda Criswell and David Lenz, the agency’s Employment Specialists. Through this training Marisa learned that the work she’d done for her family’s home ice cream business, Beekman Ice Cream, gave her the valuable skills any employer would crave. Marisa contributed to the business by taking orders from local grocery stores, doing marketing, and setting up for events including RAGBRAI, the Dayton Rodeo, and the

Webster County Fair. She learned that event management required packing, unpacking, and cleaning up following the event. IDB’s Job Readiness Training helped her recognize her transferrable skills as a customer service agent, revealing her professional demeanor and knack for quick learning. Beekman refined her resume with the help of her mother, her colleagues, and Brenda Criswell. She practiced her interviewing skills through the Job Readiness Training and got a job lead from David Lenz.

Marisa performed well in her first interview and was invited back. During her second interview, she was able to explain how she’d be able to perform the job as a Human Resource Facilitator using alternative tools and techniques. Subsequently, she was hired to work in the offices of Outlook Nebraska. Marisa started her first official job on February 12, 2013. She does the paperwork for her organization, which includes calculating and managing employees’ paid time off and verifying hours worked for payroll. She also does filing and organizes in-house customer service for the organization’s employees.

Marisa uses a closed-circuit television, Zoom Text software, and a hand-held video magnifier called the Pebble Mini in order to do her job accurately. Marisa has learned, though, that it’s not just about the adaptive technology. It’s also about putting one’s best foot forward to meet the employer’s needs. Marisa advises young professionals to “go out and do it. I’m in Omaha, my family is three hours away,” but you have to grow up sometime so you might as well go do it.” And, more importantly, Marisa advises, “You can’t live with your parents forever.” ♦

Talking Tech

w/ Michael Barber

The New Victor Reader Stream A New Look For A Popular Product



Manufacturer: Humanware
(800) 722-3393
www.humanware.com

Price: \$369.00

Do you remember when you first got your brand new Victor Reader Stream? Do you recall how excited you were to have a device that would play the NLS talking books as well as Audible.com books, read Bookshare.org books, play music and could even be used to record short voice notes and even meeting or classroom discussions? It has been about six years since that first little device became available.

Humanware has now come out with a major update to this little guy, which I think is very exciting. I was able to get my hands on this device at the twenty-eighth International CSUN Conference on Disabilities in San Diego last week and wanted to tell our readers all about it.

The first thing I noticed about the new Stream was the difference in size. It was noticeably smaller than the original Stream I have--perhaps 25 to 30% smaller. One would think smaller would mean less sound volume, but not so. Even in a crowded hall, I could tell that the sound volume was greater than the current product.

There are a few changes to the exterior of the device which will be of interest. First, there is no longer the sliding door on the back of the unit, which exposes the battery. Instead, there is a latch which, when pressed, allows removal of the entire battery. On the front of the unit, in the topmost row of buttons, right between the Go To and Bookmark buttons, you will now find a wi-fi activation button, which is a toggle for enabling or disabling wi-fi. We will come back to the wi-fi discussion in a moment. Where you used to find the AC power connector on top is where the earphone jack now resides. The stereo microphone/line in jack is on the side of the unit on the right, if the unit is facing you. The micro USB connector is on top of the unit just as before.

New Features

Before I list and describe the new features, let me say that the Stream still works just as it does now. No worries about having to learn a totally new method of using the unit.

Wi-fi Capability - The Stream is now capable of connecting wirelessly to either your home network or any other wireless hot spot available. Connecting wirelessly enables you to download and install the latest updates to the Stream when they become available. As of this writing, owners of the new Stream cannot download NLS or any other book content. Humanware tells me that the unit is ready but the providers of this content are not. You will, however, be able to connect wirelessly and download your NLS key.

Recording In Stereo - The unit has been updated to enable stereo recordings. You can create high quality MP3 or MP4 files rather than just the .WAV files created by the original unit. You will no longer need to purchase the softpack from Humanware to convert those files or use your own audio editor.

Line in Recording - Using the same microphone jack, you can now record directly from another device and create high-quality recordings.

USB Charging - Instead of using an AC power adapter to charge the unit, you may now use an adapter which plugs into the micro USB connector on top of the unit. You can either plug the other end of the USB cable into a USB port on your computer to charge it, or you can use the provided adapter which plugs into an AC outlet and charge it that way. Charging takes five hours using the AC adapter and longer when you plug it into your computer.

Improved Transfer Speed - This new unit has the capability of improved file transfer speeds.

Acapela Voices - I was very pleased to hear the much-improved Acapela voices in this new unit. The voices being used are the highest quality Heather and Ryan voices. I believe this will greatly improve your listening enjoyment as you read text, HTML, Docx, BRF or ePub files with the Stream.

No More Soft Packs to Purchase - Everything is now in the updates.

Card Capacity - Supports up to 32GB SD cards.

Battery Life - 15 hours of playing time between charges.

Customizable Sleep Timer - Although you still have the choices of 15, 30, 45 or 60 minutes for the Sleep Timer, you can now customize it and choose, for instance, 28 minutes.

Clock - A clock has been added to the updated unit. It does not presently have an option to set an alarm.

At present, this unit does not support Audible.com files, which is a major disappointment to me as I use Audible regularly. However, from an interview I heard on the Serotek Podcast Network (SPN), Humanware believes that this is only a short-term problem.

Stay tuned for the next issue of The White Cane when I will tell you about an interesting app for the iPhone which allows you to write in Braille. ◆

Friends Indeed

by Marilyn Garvey
Friends Board Secretary



Pat Smith at a fund-raising event at Java Joe's.

The Friends of the Iowa Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped was conceived in late 2005 when Karen Keninger, Peggy Chong, Randy Landgrebe, JoAnn Slayton, and Louise Duvall met to review a proposed constitution prepared by John Billingsley. The organization was formally launched the following spring at the annual Elizabeth Perowsky Volunteer Workshop.

Formed as a 501(c)(3) non-profit charitable organization to build support in the community for the IDB Library, The Friends provide assistance through fund-raising activities, membership dues, donations, and memorials. The group also provides any person with a visual, physical, or reading disability access to sacred texts in whatever format they desire.

Membership and public awareness of The Friends has been built through various outreach programs. A quarterly newsletter, *Among Friends*, now in its 7th year, shares information about various programs. Speakers from The Friends board give talks on the organization's goals and accomplishments



Jo Slayton reads a print/Braille book to a young listener.

to other organizations, including support groups and Lions Clubs. An annual garage sale became the centerpiece of the major fund-raising events. Collaborative ventures with Java Joe's and Smokey Row provide additional cash, as well as avenues for growing community awareness.

In the last five years, these efforts have reaped substantial financial benefits for IDB's Library. The Friends have donated \$10,000 annually to the Library. These funds have been used to provide:

- incentives for the Braille Challenge
- prizes for the Summer Reading Club
- cartridges for the digital conversion of books and magazines
- sacred texts for library patrons in the format they prefer
- financial support for the Elizabeth Perowsky Volunteer Workshops
- print/Braille children's books purchased for the library in 2011 and 2012
- a book laminating machine for the Library
- furniture for the Reading Room

LCAC: New Blood, New Brand

by Peggy Chong
LCAC Board Member

The Library Consumer Advisory Committee (LCAC) for the Iowa Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped has recently become re-energized under the leadership of Chairman Michael Stout.

LCAC was formed to fulfill a Library of Congress requirement that each NLS network library have an advisory committee composed of a representative group of users and members of related organizations. The committee meets three times a year to discuss and help the Library establish priorities for maintenance and expansion of services, increase public awareness of its facilities and services, and increase the potential for better serving underserved individuals.

Last year the LCAC welcomed two new members--David Dietz of West Des Moines and Kim Mapes from Melcher, Iowa.

David has been blind for only a short time but remains active. Born in 1935, he was raised in Rock Rapids, Iowa, and graduated from Iowa State College in 1958. After teaching social studies and science in Minnesota for a few years, David, his wife Flo, and their children moved to Smithtown, New York. There he taught school and held many jobs, including one at Principal, before retiring. David began to lose his eyesight during recent years and is now legally blind.

"I appreciate very much the assistance provided to persons with handicapping conditions, especially vision impairment, by agencies and organizations such as the Iowa Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped. I have benefited greatly."

He added, "Participating on the Advisory Committee is one small way I can give back to the community that has helped me."



The new LCAC logo was designed by DMACC student Delia Welch.

From the Librarian

*As if you had never
wasted or misap-
plied*

*A single moment in
all your life.*

*You can turn over a
new leaf every hour*

If you choose.



Arnold Bennett

January 1st is traditionally the time for resolutions. However, it's always made more sense to me to begin new things in harmony with Nature's year: at the spring equinox. The cycle of rebirth is evident as spring quickens all that's been dormant. That power has impelled me to step into change.

We are all called upon to figure out how to begin again throughout our lives. Life presents us with frequent change -- kids moving away, job changes, the retirement of a long-time colleague, death, all manners of endings. Whenever we experience a sudden change--those left behind are compelled to begin anew. What choice do we have? We take the first steps toward what is new and unknowable.

Seekers through the ages have pondered these questions and left the results of their work. If you are interested in books that might help you begin again, definitely contact us! I'll bet we can help you find what you are looking for.

*Sincerely,
Randy Landgrebe*

BOOKLIST

Coming of Age – Fiction and Nonfiction

By Rachel Bussan and Beth Hirst

DB/RC60319

***Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, by Jonathan Safran Foer**

Precocious nine-year-old Oskar discovers a mysterious key labeled “Black” belonging to his father, who was killed in the 9/11 World Trade Center attacks. Oskar roams New York City on a quest to find the matching lock. Some strong language. 2005.

BRD18930, DB33005

***Circle of Friends*, by Maeve Binchy**

Benny, daughter of Irish shopkeepers, becomes a schoolgirl friend of Eve, an orphan being raised in a convent. When they go to university in Dublin, their circle is enlarged to include Nan, who is ambitious, beautiful, and sophisticated. Their lives change forever as young men, family circumstances, and different goals turn their adolescence into womanhood. 1991.

LT7777, BR16411, DB47833

***Rocket Boys: A Memoir*, by Homer Hickam**

Retired NASA engineer reminisces about boyhood in the Sputnik era in West Virginia when his first rocket attempt burned down his mother’s garden fence. He and his friends improved their models culminating in winning the 1960 National Science Fair. The movie “October Sky” is based on this book. 1999.

LT9200, DB/RC69155

***The Girls From Ames: A Story Of Women And A Forty-year Friendship*, by Jeffrey Zaslow**

Chronicles the lives of eleven females, born in 1962 and 1963, from Ames, Iowa, who have remained friends through several decades. In their forties, the women share memories about their life transitions and the key to maintaining relationships. 2009.

LT8305, DB/RC64674

***The Book of Lost Things*, by John Connolly**

England, 1930s. Young David, sad and angry over his mother’s death and father’s remarriage, is transported to another realm through a gap in a garden wall. To return home, David undertakes a quest to find a king and the Book of Lost Things, growing up along the way.

Some violence. 2006.

LPV120, BR15215, DB/RC56893

***The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time*, by Mark Haddon**

Fifteen-year-old Christopher, who exhibits behavioral problems associated with autism, investigates the murder of his neighbor’s dog. His severely logical approach leads him down an unexpected path, bringing him face to face with the dissolution of his parents’ marriage while providing insight into the workings of his mind. Some strong language. 2002.

DB015391

***The Cowboys*, by William Dale Jennings**

When news of a nearby gold strike reaches Bozeman, Montana, cowhands start deserting the cattle ranches, and tough old Wil Anderson is forced to recruit a dozen boys to lead his 1500 steers through stampedes, rivers, Indian uprisings, and prairie fires. 1971. ♦

To request these or other titles contact your Reader’s Advisor at (800) 362-2587.

Ready to Make a New Start

by Rebecca Swainey
Braille Teacher

Linda Manders had her life and career in order. But a series of changes in her vision forced her to take some major steps that helped her regain her sense of independence and self worth.

After receiving a Bachelor's Degree in Accounting from Loras College in Dubuque, she went to work as night auditor for the Julian Hotel. She balanced registers, created cash sheets and did customer service for five years before moving on. In 1991, Linda became an accounting clerk for Crescent Electric Supply Company, a top-ten U.S. electrical distribution company. Her responsibilities included performing data entry, reconciling bank statements, depositing tickets and other credits, and creating and proofreading reports and balance sheets. Eventually, her duties expanded to include travel to other company sites, taking her to such far-flung destinations as California and Alaska. She was well established in the career of her choice.

Then, in 1997, she learned she had Macular Degeneration and Geographic Atrophy. At the time, the conditions seemed minor with little impact on her life. She got a 22" computer monitor and learned to zoom in on text to make it as large as possible. Her life and work continued. But over time, she gradually lost more vision until the day came when she could no longer perform her job duties even with a bigger monitor. In 2011, following the advice of her doctor, she called the Iowa Department for the Blind to refer herself for services.

Jamie Phipps, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor for the Dubuque area, met with Linda to talk about the services available from IDB. With the help of other department staff, Jamie introduced Linda to several pieces of



Linda Manders helping to decorate the Rec Room at IDB.

technology designed to aid her in completing visually the tasks that she was finding so difficult. While the monitor no longer enlarged text enough, Zoomtext Version 9.1 software did. Once again she was able to visually navigate Windows XP with Office Suite 2003 and continue working in Outlook and Excel. She was also introduced to the Ruby Pocket Magnifier and a Topaz 2XL CCTV with a large, easy to move table and rotating screen. When Linda acknowledged having some concerns recognizing and navigating steps and curbs, Jamie provided her with a long-white cane and began initial travel instruction. With these tools in place, Linda felt confident to continue her work, including company travel to distant locations.

All seemed well—a quick fix easily accomplished with a few pieces of technology. But one year later, Linda again called to inform her counselor she could no longer keep up with her job duties. The company had converted to Wells Fargo's purchase card system, and the website colors and font style were very difficult

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for her to distinguish. In addition, the new system altered some procedures, requiring her to find her way through unfamiliar processes. She found it harder to keep up with her work despite the accommodations that had been provided. Straining to see made her eyes very sore. Together with her supervisor, she decided it was time to resign her position. When telling her counselor of this decision, Linda stated that she definitely wanted to continue to work, but she no longer felt confident in her ability to do so.

Jamie suggested Linda come to Des Moines for a tour of the Department and to take a particularly close look at the training provided in the Orientation Center. Linda immediately liked what she saw and made arrangements to enter the Center as soon as her calendar would allow. Meanwhile, as she waited to begin the program, she requested cooking, sewing, and introductory Braille lessons in addition to further travel instruction. This training was provided by Rehabilitation Teacher Marcia Bauer, who also works in the Dubuque area. She wanted to waste no time, recognizing

“Macular degeneration runs in my family, and the attitude has always been that other family members will take care of those with vision problems. But I don’t want to be dependent on someone else. I want to have charge of my own life.”

—Linda Manders
Orientation Center student

quickly from her Center tour that the knowledge and use of non-visual techniques would broaden her options. But there was something far more significant—something that for Linda was the ultimate selling point.

“As I lost more vision, I was losing a lot of self-confidence. My boss was calling me on every little thing, and I was beginning to doubt my abilities. My overall sense of self-worth was sinking lower and lower. Macular degeneration runs in my family, and the attitude has always been that other family members will take care of those with vision problems. But I don’t want to be dependent on someone else. I want to have charge of my own life. When I toured the Center, I heard them say again and again that the purpose of the training is to learn skills to be independent and to develop a sense of confidence as a blind person. I knew then it was the place for me. I was ready for a new beginning.”

Linda took that first giant step when she entered the Center on November 5, 2012. ♦

own rather than running to someone else for help.” She continues to test the boundaries of her comfort zone and tries things she never would have done before receiving training. “I don’t have the fear I had before. It doesn’t bother me as much if people know I have vision problems.” She now wishes she had accepted IDB services at the first opportunity. In fact, this summer she hopes to attend the Orientation Center to further improve her confidence and skills.

Carol believes her life was renewed the day Liz Soenen walked through her front door. “It’s like I woke up again. I was just kind of living each day but not really living. Now I put more life in there. It’s a better life now...I am more IN it. A lot more IN it.” ♦

For more information on other independent living services, call (800) 362-2587 or e-mail barb.weigel@blind.state.ia.us

Danielle Dunagan: Looking forward to a bright future

by Julie Aufdenkamp
Transition Counselor

Eighteen-year-old Danielle Dunagan, of Onawa, Iowa, is looking forward to the future and is excited to discover what's in store for her as she approaches a major milestone in her life. She is nearing the end of her senior year and preparing to take a big first step from the halls of West Monona High School onto the campus of the University of Iowa. With a personal philosophy of taking everything that life throws at her in stride, Dunagan intends to move forward and not let vision loss or anything else hinder her course.



Danielle has been blind since birth. Her vision loss is due to Bilateral Optic Nerve Hypoplasia, which is caused by the underdevelopment of the optic nerves. The disease impacts central and peripheral vision as well as night vision.

Throughout her high school career, Danielle has been an active and regular participant in the Iowa Department for the Blind Transition Program. This program for blind and visually impaired teens features retreats and activities focusing on life skills training, assistive technology exploration, education/career planning, work experience, community/volunteer service, recreation, outdoor adventure, peer involvement, and personal/social development.

According to Danielle, every teen, whether visually impaired or not, should have an opportunity to participate in a career-prep program. She believes that, in particular,

the employment-related learning opportunities and activities provided by the Transition Program have had a positive impact in preparing her for life after high school. The development of peer connections and advocacy skills have been two more positive aspects of her experience. She has formed many good friendships with other teens from across the state of Iowa and has learned to advocate for herself and not to be afraid to ask for what she needs. "However," she says. "Don't use your disability as a crutch!"

On a daily basis, Danielle takes her own advice about moving forward, self-advocacy, and not allowing vision loss to be a barrier in life. At school, she pushes herself with a challenging academic schedule and extra-curricular activities.

Danielle's extra-curricular activities include concert band, honor band, speech, quiz bowl, and FCCLA (Family Career and Community Leaders of America). In her "spare" time, she pursues her passions of writing, music, and hanging out with friends.

At school Danielle uses accommodations such as preferential seating and large print materials. She also has a monocular in class for distance viewing. Her technology includes a MacBook computer equipped with screen enlargement and Voice Over screen-reading software. She uses the computer for classwork, homework, and taking notes. She has learned how to use a white cane. She plans to use the same tools, techniques, and technology in college and is considering the use of audio textbooks as well.

An internship in the marketing department of a local hospital last summer provided

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BEP manager Abe Sigler features healthy food choices in his vending machines at the Hoover State Office Building.

What entices a person to leave successful employment, go back into training, and enter a new career? What factors make a person take the risks involving such a life-changing move, especially with a new wife and baby daughter to consider?

Abraham “Abe” Sigler is just that type of self-reliant individual. Before entering IDB’s Business Enterprises Program, Abe already had a long and successful work history with a variety of employers. In high school, he worked at a local hardware store stocking shelves, cashiering, and working elsewhere in the store when needed. Similar employment at a local convenience store followed. His last job in high school involved making pizzas.

I first met Abe when he was a student at our Adult Orientation Center. As is our custom, two managers and I

visited the Business of Blindness discussion class one day to talk with the Center students about BEP. Abe was an interested member of that audience. Afterward, he stopped by my office to discuss the possibility of becoming an operator, and I recommended he enter the program. Abe embarked on a different, though temporary, course of action, deciding to take classes at Des Moines Area Community College.

Sometime later, Abe volunteered to do some substitute teaching at the Center. When I encountered him again, quite naturally, BEP was on my agenda. Although he had enjoyed his previous stints in the student and working world, Abe’s entrepreneurial streak surfaced. “After experiencing what it would be like as an educator, I decided I’d rather be self-employed,” he said.

Abe began his extensive BEP training in September of

2011 and became licensed on April 1, 2012. During this time, he had an opportunity to express interest in and “bid” on some vacant facilities but felt he was not yet ready. He wanted to wait until his training was complete and, since he was living in Ames with a new wife and daughter, geography was also a factor. Eventually, however, an opportunity in Central Iowa came his way. He applied for and was selected to become manager of the Hoover Building Vending Facility on the State Capitol Complex. He took over this site on June 22, 2012.

Since this was his first business, Abe encountered many challenges. He recalls his greatest challenge as “understanding the product selection preferences of the customer and matching them with the proper product inventory.” The Hoover Building has a variety of vending

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Abe strives to keep his vending machines stocked with interesting options.

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machines on seven floors, including coffee, snack, beverage and cold food. It takes time to learn all of the business nuances and, since he followed two very successful veteran managers, customers became a bit impatient. Abe describes this period as “growing pains.” In time, customers soon became familiar with Abe and his staff, understood that he was responsive and friendly, and realized he would meet their vending needs. Of course, with challenges come rewards. Not surprisingly, Abe found his biggest reward as “being self-employed and becoming successful after the initial growing pains. I have satisfied customers now.”

As his business grows, Abe is on board with a cutting-edge trend. The Iowa Department of Public Health has begun an initiative to encourage vending machine operators to provide more healthy

food options. “I can see the demand,” he stated. At a meeting with building tenants held on September 20, 2012, customers expressed their desire for such “healthy choices.” As a result, Abe has worked closely with IDPH personnel and is the leader on the Complex in this endeavor. As IDPH gathers additional data on nutrition and products that offer healthier options, Abe has asked to be involved. He is confident that there will be continued demand, additional products, and more options in the future.

What else does the future hold for Abe in the way of business challenges and rewards? One continuing challenge he faces is determining the variety of cold food products his customers will purchase. These products have a short shelf life, and it takes a real art to know what might or might not sell on any given day. As he gains

experience, he plans to improve his responsiveness to customer’s food and beverage requests and to provide the healthy products they demand.

Abe shares some advice for those who wish to become self-employed. “Live close to your facility and work hard,” he admonishes. If he had to do it over again, he would have done more to establish a relationship with suppliers before he became a manager to ease the stress of obtaining product and inventory when his business began. When he began his stint at the Hoover, he lived in Ames, a commute of about 30 miles. He is currently exploring a residence closer to Des Moines to save time as well as labor costs. Of course, gaining experience and know-how are just part of an ongoing process. “If you don’t learn, you won’t be around,” is a phrase he lives by.

Enthusiasm, love of work, ability to communicate with customers, increased competence and confidence as time moves along are just some of the reasons why Abe has succeeded in his journey from an inexperienced man who wanted to be self-employed to a successful businessman. With this multi-faceted positive attitude, Abe’s business adventure is well on its way. ♦

Danielle with valuable work experience in an area related to her vocational goal. She plans to attend the University of Iowa in Iowa City and major in history and possibly English and minor in a foreign language like French or Russian. She also plans to earn a museum certificate to help her pursue a career in creative writing and museum work. Once she completes her college education, she is willing to go wherever life and work may take her.

Although Danielle has a positive attitude about blindness, there is one thing she finds irritating about vision loss. She wishes she could go where she wants when she wants and not have to wait on transportation. Currently, she relies on family and friends for rides in and around her Northwest Iowa community. When she goes to college in the fall, she plans to take full advantage of public transportation.

Danielle is no different than any other high school senior with dreams and ambitions as she looks ahead to college. While she admits to occasional fears of the unknown, she is ready to embrace a new chapter in her life – a new beginning – and her blindness will not deter her. ♦



Danielle on horseback at a Transition weekend retreat.

What is the IDB Transition Program?

The Iowa Department for the Blind begins working with blind and visually impaired youth as they prepare to graduate high school and transition into a career field. At age 14, a teen becomes eligible for services by registering with a Transition Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor. The youth and his or her parents work with the counselor to set academic and career goals and put a plan in motion to meet those goals. This often includes gaining work experience before graduating from high school and adopting good study habits to prepare for college, as well as learning self-advocacy and independence skills that help lead to success.

Youth in the IDB Transition Program can participate in a variety of weekend and summer retreats. Through a wide range of fun and interactive activities, participants discover the value of learning problem-solving and non-visual techniques and discover a more positive way to view themselves and their vision loss. As a result, these young people develop the independence they need to take charge of their own lives.

Mid-way through their senior year in high school, the Transition Program participants are transferred to a regular Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor to continue services in their quests to reach their employment goals.

For more information or to get involved in the Youth Transition Program, contact Keri Osterhaus at Keri.Osterhaus@blind.state.ia.us, 515-281-1307. ♦

By Linda Slayton

First steps are early milestones on a path to an eventual outcome. Sometimes that's a goal that is both known and sought, and other times we embark on a journey before we even realize where we're going. Sometimes the final destination is good, sometimes less desirable. But when we add up all of those steps, it defines our life.

Many of us have watched a baby teetering on the verge of walking. They stumble, sway, stagger, fall, get up over and over until, finally, they take an actual step. Of course the effort of taking that first step didn't start on that day. It started when they first interacted with the world around them. Walking wasn't the goal. Walking was just another means in their journey to get to all of the places they wanted to go. However, as we watched, we felt great joy and a sense of accomplishment for them for taking those initial steps. Again, the age-old question—is life more about the journey or the destination?

An illustration from my own life involving first steps began in the spring of 1989



while I was a student at the University of Iowa. I signed up to attend a study seminar in Washington, D.C., over spring break. While there, I literally stumbled upon an opportunity for an internship with the Smithsonian Institution. Incredibly, I found myself being offered a position for the upcoming summer.

After returning to Iowa, I resumed my normal routine. I talked about the internship with friends and family, but talking was about as far as I got. Finally, a really good friend had the wherewithal to say to me, "If you're going to do this, you either need to do something to line things up, or you need to stop talking about it. Unless you do something, you're never going to go."

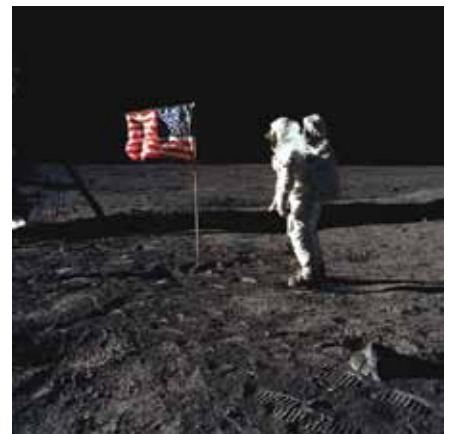
I realized my friend was right. I had been stalling. I was afraid of taking those first steps. I was afraid of living in a large city as a blind person. I was scared to be alone there. I worried about money and where I would live. I'd taken my eyes off the prize. I had the opportunity of a lifetime, and my fear nearly destroyed it.

So I talked to my advisor regarding college credit. I spoke with the Iowa Department for the Blind about financial assistance. I spoke

to my supervisor at the Smithsonian about housing options. Each step brought me closer to my goal. Before I realized what was happening, I was traveling to D.C. again.

That's not where this story ends, though. You see, this story hasn't ended. The impact of that experience lingers to this day. That internship opened doors for me, increased my confidence, and encouraged me to travel and meet new people. It changed my whole outlook. I never reverted to the person I was before that summer. The experience became part of my life and who I am now. That's the thing about first steps – we only have to take them once. The others are simply a continuation of the path we take from there. ♦

Linda Slayton is a freelance writer living in Des Moines. She can be reached by email at lcslayton@yahoo.com



"That's one small step for man....."

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In these tough times, The Friends have been remarkably successful in achieving financial solvency and contributing that annual donation to the Library. Additionally, The Friends have given time, talent and dollars to IDB's Oral History Project, which recorded and collected anecdotal accounts and historical documents about blindness in Iowa. What's ahead for The Friends as we assist the Library in staying abreast of the changes that make the lives of blind and physically handicapped patrons easier? One way can be through the increased use of social media and other outreach activities to touch the lives of those who still don't know the treasures that await them at IDB's Library.

The current Friends board is:

Pat Smith, President
John Billingsley, Vice-President
Marilyn Garvey, Secretary
Korey Keninger, Treasurer
David Hammel
Norm Hall
Mary Clarke
Darlene Greenfield
Donna Seliger

It's Easy to Be a Friend

Membership in the Friends is \$20 annually, \$10 for students. Donations, memorials, and bequests will be accepted gladly at any time. Contact:

Friends of the Iowa Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped
P.O. Box 93046
Des Moines, IA 50393-3046
Phone: (515) 288-1241
E-mail: library_friends@msn.com ◆

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Kim Mapes lives in Melcher-Dallas with her husband and 22-year old son, who is a patron of the library for the blind. She graduated from Simpson College with a BA in Elementary Education.

Kim says, "I am now self-employed and work mostly from home. As a former educator, an avid reader, and the mother of a son who has multiple disabilities, including blindness, I saw the Library Consumer Advisory Committee as an opportunity to be involved with an organization that provides a service that is very close to my heart -- books and the services that make them accessible to those with disabilities."

Recently, the LCAC has commenced new efforts to reach out to the public. The committee has worked with DMACC graphic design student Delia Welch to develop a logo. It will be displayed on the LCAC's newly established Facebook page.

The Library Consumer Advisory Committee is always looking for energetic people to serve on the committee. If you are interested, contact Mike Stout, Chairman, at mikeandarrow@gmail.com or Randy Landgrebe, Library Program Administrator, at randy.landgrebe@blind.state.ia.us or 515-281-1291. ◆



Members of the Library Consumer Advisory Committee pause after a meeting in the Director's Conference Room at IDB. From left--Peggy Chong, Gary Patterson, David Dietz, April Enderton, Mike Stout, and Teresa Haifley.

NOTES

Director

Richard Sorey

Richard.Sorey@blind.state.ia.us

Deputy Director

Bruce Snethen

bruce.snethen@blind.state.ia.us

Commission for the Blind

Next meeting: Saturday, April 13, 2013,
10:00 a.m.

Director's Conference Room, IDB

Mike Hoenig, Commission Chair

Peggy Elliott, Member

Sandra Ryan, Member

Mission:

The Iowa Department for the Blind is the means for persons who are blind to obtain for themselves universal accessibility and full participation in society in whatever roles they may choose, including roles that improve Iowa's economic growth.

- We would love to come speak about blindness at your club or organization's next meeting.
- We also provide training workshops on blindness at your school or office.
- If you've never seen our building and want to learn more about our services and what we provide in our building, we'd love to give you a tour.

Email us at information@blind.state.ia.us or call us at (800) 362-2587 for more information.

UPCOMING EVENTS

April 13

**Iowa Commission for the Blind Meeting
IDB Building, Des Moines, IA**

Director's Conference Room, 10:00 a.m.

April 19

**Elizabeth Perowsky Volunteer Workshop
and Luncheon**

IDB Building, Des Moines, IA

Library volunteers attend training workshops, enjoy a luncheon, and receive recognition at an awards ceremony. The day's schedule includes a free and open-to-the-public presentation by Tom Milligan as The Not So Quiet Librarian from 12:45 p.m. to 1:30 p.m. in the Assembly Room. Made possible by a grant from Humanities Iowa.



July 31-August 3

Ready, Set, Go

IDB Building, Des Moines, IA

College prep program for high school students who are blind or visually impaired that are considering higher education.

September 7

Mentoring Program Training

IDB Building, Des Moines, IA

Training workshop from 10:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. for persons who have qualified to become a mentor.

More upcoming events and details at
www.idbonline.org/news

This may be your last large print White Cane.

**IDB continues to face the challenges of
budget pressures and we want you to know:**

- **The White Cane is going to a production schedule of two issues a year - a Spring and a Fall issue.**
- **We will continue to distribute the White Cane in electronic formats as we have in the past and will make them available on our web site at www.idbonline.org/publications/white-cane. A notice for when the on-line version of the magazine is available will continue to be sent via email. Sign up by contacting tiffany.bickell@blind.state.ia.us**
- **If large print is the only viable format for you to enjoy the White Cane, please register for our updated large print mailing list by calling Tiffany Bickell at 515-281-1336 OR email her at tiffany.bickell@blind.state.ia.us**
- **Thank you for your support. We will strive to produce the same high quality publication called the White Cane to keep you apprised of the work of the Iowa Department for the Blind.**